

# Second Chechen War: Causes, Dynamics and Termination - A Civil War Between Risk and Opportunity? \*

[ DRAFT VERSION - NOT PROOFREAD ]

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## I. Introduction

The war in Chechnya has been the symbol of Russia's disintegration at both national and international level. It marked a period in which Russia, a Permanent Member of the Security Council of the United Nations and more precisely the military and political cornerstone of the former Eastern Bloc, could not even secure the stability and integrity of its national borders. Western military experts, academia and human rights activists made various proposals with respect to the solution of this internal conflict such as the recognition of special regime of significant autonomy for Chechnya, the creation of a system of international administration or even the formation of a separate and independent state even by way of a military intervention initiated from abroad.<sup>1</sup> Of course, time has shown that proposals such as the aforementioned proved to be nothing more than empty thoughts or wishful thinking.

The present paper deals with Second Chechen war from the standpoint of the political science. Its main purpose is to analyze its causes, dynamics and termination. The paper is structured as follows: First, it offers a brief overview of the main theories applied for explaining the emergence of internal conflicts. Then, it deals with the formal outbreak of the Second Chechen war and examines whether the Second Chechen war does *prima facie* constitute a civil war. Afterwards the paper examines the main causes that led to this conflict. In this respect, factors such as previous wars, fragile institutions as well as activities and interests of so-called entrepreneurs of violence are briefly discussed. Hereafter, the paper focuses on the financial and organizational opportunities of the Second Chechen war. The ideological transformation of the conflict is followed by the analysis of its dynamics and termination. In this context, issues concerning its weakening, the course to normality as well as the recourse to terrorist methods are to be examined.

In any case, it should be born in mind from the outset that the present paper faces serious limitations. It takes into account only a small proportion of Western literature. Thus, its sources constitute a very small part of the, yet, never-ending bulk of international bibliography concerning the Second Chechen war. Moreover, although the existing bibliography is vast, the primary resources available are restricted and the access to it extremely limited since the elapsed time from the very outbreak of the Chechen conflict is very short and, hence, it cannot justify the opening of the State Archives from the part of Russian Federation. Finally, as the "solutions" referred to in the first paragraph of this paper indicate, the Second Chechen war is by its nature inextricably linked both to emotionally and politically motivated argumentation. Hence, keeping an impartial perspective appears to be more than a challenging task.

## II. Theoretical and Methodological Remarks

A common starting point for explaining the emergence of internal conflicts is the so-called ancient hatreds theory.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, internal conflicts can be easily explained by certain historical patterns of violence among different ethnological groups. These hatreds are supposed to be temporarily controlled by the dominance of a super-entity such as the communistic regime of USSR or the former Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> Once the super-entity ceases to exist, the ancient hatreds are supposed to revive. In case of Chechnya, such a theory would on the one hand focus on a perceived eternal war between Chechens and Russians by presenting

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Russell (2006). 941 *et seq.*, Tremper (2004), 131 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Brown (1997), 3; Mueller (2000), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Mueller (2000), 44.

the Russian Empire of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century as a colonizer and the subsequent Soviet Union as a perpetrator of a massive deportation of the free spirited mountain nation of Chechens.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the focus might be on a perceived mission of spreading civilization and the principles of the organized life to wild mountainous tribes, who, furthermore, during the Second World War were willing to fight hand to hand with the of axis-powers and especially with the Nazi-Germans.<sup>5</sup> Hence, on the basis of that theory the emergence of the Chechen-Russian conflict after the collapse of USSR would appear to be nothing but natural.

Obviously, this very “ancient-hatreds” approach to a civil conflict is of a static- as well as of a backward-looking nature. It merely sheds light only on one historical dimension of a conflict.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is mainly based on national narratives which by their very nature are supposed to praise the nation in reference. More important, such an approach runs the danger of being over-simplistic given the fact that social, political and economic interactions are not taken into account.<sup>7</sup> Of course, elements of the “ancient hatreds” theory are used in cases of civil conflicts or even inter-state wars by the respective elites in order to mobilize the respective populations. Yet, such an approach is considered to be a more outdated and a less academic one for the study of internal conflicts, since it is also rarely supported by any empirical evidence.<sup>8</sup> In this context, *Brown* (1997) critically pointed out that the “ancient hatreds” theory is incapable of explaining why violent conflicts have broken out in some places but not in others or why some conflicts are more violent to resolve than others.<sup>9</sup>

Instead, current research tends to focus more on specific factors/conditions that favor the onset of an insurgency or a civil war. According to the seminal work of *Fearon/Laitin* (2003) such factors include i) poverty which characterizes financially and administratively weak states and enables recruitment of rebels; ii) political instability and newly formed states; iii) rough terrain and large populations; iv) foreign support and, finally v) dependence of the state-economy on the export of natural resources such as oil and gas.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the importance of the domestic elites for the outbreak of an internal conflict should not be undermined.<sup>11</sup>

Having as a starting point the aforementioned considerations, the present paper is going to deal with the second Chechen war by combining elements of the risk theory as described in the study of *Zürcher* (2007) as well as of the *Collier-Hoeffler* model on civil war onsets.

Risk theory recognizes opportunity as determining factor of rebellion. For example, according to *Zürcher* (2007) there are six main factors that increase society's risk to internal conflict such as: i) low level of economic development; ii) state collapse; iii) conflict financing; iv) previous wars; v) ethnic geography and vi) mountainous terrain. The *Collier-Hoeffler* model considers rebellion as an industry which generates profits. Availability of finance is, thus, a critical factor that increases the risk of rebellion. In this respect, the model recognizes three main sources for financing a rebellion such as:<sup>12</sup> i) extortion of natural resources; ii) donations from diasporas; iii) subventions from hostile governments. Then, this

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<sup>4</sup> Jansen (2010, 91 *et seq.*

<sup>5</sup> Jansen (2010), 92 *et seq.*

<sup>6</sup> Brown (1997), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Fearon/Laitin (2003), 76; Brown (1997), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Fearon/Laitin (2003), 75.

<sup>9</sup> Brown (1997), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Fearon/Laitin (2003) 75, 82 *et seq.*

<sup>11</sup> Brown (1997), 17; Kaufman (1996), 116 *et seq.*

<sup>12</sup> Collier/Hoeffler/Sambanis (2005), 6 *et seq.*

model deals with the opportunities which reduce the costs for organizing a rebellion. To this category belong i) low GDP, low income per capita or status of the secondary schooling of males; ii) cheap conflict-specific capital such as weapon stocks and military skills; iii) weak government military capacity and, finally, iv) social cohesion, e.g. ethnic and religious diversity. It should be underlined, however, from the very outset that there is an overlapping among these approaches, since they merely form different prisms through which one can look at an internal conflict.

### III. Formal Outbreak of the Second Chechen war

The formal outbreak of the Second Chechen war goes back to August 1999 when under the leadership of commanders Shamil Basayev and Amir Khatab the Chechen rebels invaded the neighboring republic of Dagestan aiming at liberating it and uniting it with Chechnya in order to form an Islamist republic.<sup>13</sup> The local Dagestani population supported by Russian forces resisted and gradually drove the rebel forces back into Chechnya. The invasion was followed by a series of bomb explosions in Moscow on 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> September 1999 respectively which resulted in 228 deaths. Responsible for these attacks were held to be the Chechens although according to the criticism raised by some scholars no proof has been shown concerning their involvement.<sup>14</sup> In this context, *Dannreuther/March* (2008) point out that these very bomb attacks on apartment blocks had a traumatic impact on Russian population similar to that felt by Americans after the attacks of 11 September 2001. For Russia, this constituted an ideal strategic moment to react decisively.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Russian army attacked positions within Chechnya including its capital, Grozny, in a combined air- and ground operation. Finally, the army entered Chechnya in October 1999 with a great military force amounting to 100,000 soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Military experts maintain that the Russian response in Chechnya from August 1999 until March 2000 has been in the form of a massive conventional military invasion characterized by heavy and unrestricted use of air power and firepower to the extent that the force usage would never qualify that conflict as a low intensity or a limited war; it rather constituted a conventional full-scale interstate war.<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, in 1999 and 2000, Chechnya was the scene of regular armed operations which were subsequently replaced by guerrilla warfare.<sup>18</sup>

### IV. A Civil War ?

#### A. Elements of Civil War

Academic literature does not provide any generally recognized definition of the concept of “civil war”. The latter appears to be a rather dynamic concept which cannot be easily subsumed under a common global norm. A typical definition of civil war is to be found in *Small/Singer* (1982) and consists of four elements:<sup>19</sup> i) military action internal to the metropole; ii) the active participation of the national government; iii) effective resistance by

<sup>13</sup> Zürcher (2007), 92; this attack has been characterized as the begin of the fourth phase of the Chechen conflict by *Dash* (2000), 1519.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Zürcher (2007), 92; Tremper (2004), 128.

<sup>15</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 99.

<sup>16</sup> Zürcher (2007), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Bakshi, B.G. (2000), 884.

<sup>18</sup> Falkowski (2007), 39

<sup>19</sup> Sambanis (2004), 816.

both sides; iv) more than 1000 deaths. Based on this definition, *Sambanis* (2004) developed a very detailed list of the main features of a civil war. Hence, with a certain degree of abstraction, a civil war is supposed to fulfill the following elements:<sup>20</sup> (1) Territorial: The war takes place within the territory of a state that is a member of the international system with a population of 500,000 or greater. (2) Political: The parties are politically and militarily organized, and they have publicly stated political objectives. (3) Governmental: The government (through its military or militias) must be a principal combatant (4) Organizational/Local: The main insurgent organization must be locally represented and must recruit locally. (5) Body-count/Mutual damage: The start year of the war is the first year that the conflict causes at least 500 to 1,000 deaths. Throughout its duration, the conflict must be characterized by sustained violence, at least at the minor or intermediate level. There should be no 3-year period during which the conflict causes fewer than 500 deaths. Moreover, throughout the war, the weaker party must be able to mount effective resistance. Effective resistance is measured by at least 100 deaths inflicted on the stronger party.

In the subsequent part, the aforementioned elements will be applied to the Second Chechen war in order to examine whether this conflict can be subsumed under the definition developed by *Sambanis* (2004).

## **B. Applying the Elements to the Second Chechen War**

1. Territorial Element: Chechnya is a republic located in the southwest part of Russia. In particular it is situated in the northeast region of Caucasus. To the east, north, and west, Chechnya borders with Dagestan, Stavropol Krai, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia, while to the southwards it borders with Georgia.<sup>21</sup> The capital, Grozny, as well as the other larger settlements lie in the middle part of Chechnya, between the mountains in the south and the Terek Plains in the north. In this very region, most of the intensive fighting has taken place.<sup>22</sup> The mountainous territory of Chechnya has been used by the rebels as a safe retreat as well as a lifeline for military supplies.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the territorial element is fulfilled because at least at the early stages of the Second Chechen war, the conflict took place on a specially identifiable territory.

2. Political Element: In 1991, Chechnya unilaterally declared its independence from Russia. Since then, Russia has initiated two wars, in 1994 and 1999 attempting to secure control over the secessionist republic. At first glance, both Chechen wars seem to fit perfectly to the classical script of nationalist-secessionist war pursuant to the political element.<sup>24</sup> In this context, it has been pointed out that in the eyes of the European medias the Chechen conflict has been presented as “a national struggle for independence, and Chechen fighters were usually referred to as rebels.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the political element appears to be fulfilled as well.

3. Governmental Element: Since the Chechen combatants were primarily targeting either the official Russian forces or, later, the pro-Russian Chechen forces and the Russian army, primarily, was targeting Chechen combatants this element appears to be fulfilled as well.

4. Organizational/Local Element: The largest and most dominant ethnic group within Chechnya was the Chechen one. The fact that ethnic Russians were poorly organized and not

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<sup>20</sup> Sambanis (2004), 829-830.

<sup>21</sup> Zürcher (2007), 70 *et seq.*

<sup>22</sup> Zürcher (2007), 70

<sup>23</sup> Zürcher (2007), 71.

<sup>24</sup> Jansen (2010), 100; Falkowski (2007), 41.

<sup>25</sup> Zürcher (2007), 95.

mobilized contributed to the speed of Chechen revolt.<sup>26</sup> The latter is supposed to have met no resistance from the local population. The amount of men in Chechnya who were able and willing to fight amounted to 20,000.<sup>27</sup> Fighting units were usually based on extended families. In fact, the local/organizational element appears to be fulfilled as well.

5. Body-count/Mutual damage: Due to the lack of data it is very difficult to estimate the accurate number of those who fell during the second Chechen war. According to *Zürcher* (2007), during the period 1999-2002 around 4,500 Russian soldiers, 3000 Chechen fighters and 13,000 civilians have lost their lives. According to *Amnesty International* in 2007, up to 25,000 civilians were killed since 1999, with another 5,000 people missing.<sup>28</sup> This great amount of human costs is attributed pursuant to *Sagramoso* (2007) to the perpetuation of a spiral of violence.<sup>29</sup> Be that as it may, the fact is that the level of casualties appears to be extremely high, thus fulfilling the body-count element.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, till 2008, there has been no 3-year period with less than 500 deaths<sup>31</sup> exactly just as the *Sambanis* (2004) model requires.

Result: At first glance, all elements of *Sambanis* (2004) theory appear to be fulfilled. Therefore, one could argue that, at least the early years of the Second Chechen war, the conflict did constitute a “civil war”.

## V. Main Cause: Wars breed Wars, Fragile Institutions and Violence Entrepreneurs

The main reason for the occurrence of the Second Chechen war is to be found in the period between the end of the First and the beginning of the Second Chechen war, the so-called interwar period.

This period is characterized by increased armed crime and organized kidnapping business as well as by competition among warlords for power and for profits respectively. The fragile state authority and institutions were dismantled and replaced by alternative criminal ones. In fact, the first Chechen war had brought into power so-called entrepreneurs of violence, that is warlords who were more interested in the perpetuation of an economy of war than in establishing statehood.<sup>32</sup> Once the profits from the prolongation of a violence were threatened by a system of checks and balances designed to establish polity, they managed without difficulty to bypass these structures by resorting to violence.<sup>33</sup>

The First Chechen war ended with the retreat of the Russian forces in 1996.<sup>34</sup> Dzhokhar Dudayev, the leader of the Chechen rebels and the first president of Chechnya, died in 1996 and was replaced by Aslan Maskhadov, the military commander of the Chechen rebels, who won the elections in Chechnya in January 1997. However, he, as a central authority, faced the resistance of the field commanders.<sup>35</sup> In particular, his attempts to incorporate them into the state apparatus and put them under control failed. The same holds true for his attempts to co-opt the commanders into the state. Consequently, he also did not

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<sup>26</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 106.

<sup>28</sup> See

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nca/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=4179&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=189&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nca/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4179&tx_ttnews[backPid]=189&no_cache=1) (last visited 18/11/2012).

<sup>29</sup> *Sagramoso* (2007), 699 *et seq.*

<sup>30</sup> *Diehl/Karfurke/Kühn/Münch/Tschesche* (2008), 18.

<sup>31</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties\\_of\\_the\\_Second\\_Chechen\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Second_Chechen_War) (last visited 18/11/2012).

<sup>32</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 112; *Russell* (2006), 954.

<sup>34</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 81, 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 90.



succeed in putting under his control the distribution of the material resources, in particular revenues from the shadow economy and oil-profits. Once in July 1998 Maskhadov ordered by presidential decree the dissolution of all armed groups, the commanders moved into open opposition to their president.<sup>36</sup> In the fall of 1998, the dismantling of state institutions was formally concluded.<sup>37</sup>

All in all, the first Chechen war weakened the existing fragile institutions considerably and the entrepreneurs of violence who came into power had no interest in statehood and stability. Just before the formal outbreak of the Second Chechen war, Chechnya's state of affairs was comparable with that of a failed state.<sup>38</sup>

## **VI. Opportunities**

### **A. Financing**

According to the *Collier-Hoeffler* model, opportunity constitutes a determining factor of rebellion. Such an opportunity is present if and only if there are financial resources available for rebellion. In this respect, the model focuses on three sources of financing, that is extortion of natural resources, donations from diaspora and subventions from hostile governments. The following chapter is going to deal with these issues vis-a-vis the Second Chechen war as well as with an additional one, namely revenues from shadow economy. In fact, shadow economy is supposed to have played a decisive role as regards the organization of violence and emergence of the so-called "entrepreneurs of violence". In this respect, *Zürcher* (2007) vividly points out that the profits "accumulated in the shadow and criminal economies proved to be the single most important source of revenues for the various rebel movements."<sup>39</sup>

#### **1. Extortion of natural resources**

The republic of Chechnya owns considerable oil reserves. Before the Second World War, these oil fields used to be the most productive within the Soviet Union after those in Ajerbaijan.<sup>40</sup> By the beginning of 1980s the reserves had shrunk whereas in the beginning of 1990s the production had fallen sharply. While thus according to *Zürcher* (2007) these reserves appear not to have had a strategic significance for Russia in 1990s, they did play an important role in the internal struggle for power.<sup>41</sup> In fact, it is widely held, that by 1991 almost one third of the republics budget was covered by revenues stemming from legal as well as illegal oil-business.<sup>42</sup>

#### **2. Donations from Diaspora and Subventions from Foreign Governments**

Many foreign Islamic funds and organizations are supposed to have opened offices in

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<sup>36</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 92.

<sup>37</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 92, 111.

<sup>38</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 86.

<sup>39</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 72.

<sup>41</sup> But see the strong counterarguments in *Dash* (2000), 1518 *et seq.* Accordingly, the geoeconomic importance of Chechnya is enhanced by the fact that an oil pipeline runs through the heart of the country and there is no alternative route. Furthermore, it is considered to be part of a corridor leading to the Caspian oil and hydrocarbon wealth. In fact, literature on geoeconomics such as *Towner* (2001) does indeed identify a strong causal relationship between natural resources, especially oil, and the Chechen war.

<sup>42</sup> *Zürcher* (2007), 72.

the region of North Caucasus. Among other issues, they supported the construction of new mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic literature. Funds such as Al Haramain, the Islamic Benevolence Foundation and the Islamic Salvation Organization it is said to have provided support to local Islamic groups in Dagestan and in Chechnya.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, there have been reported large financial flows to Chechnya from states such as the Arab Emirates, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>44</sup> In other words, it appears very likely that Chechen rebels attracted a fair share of the international funding for jihad, a source of finance that is admittedly difficult to block.<sup>45</sup> Finally, one should also add that the literature does not exclude financial support stemming from other external forces with specific geopolitical interest in the region as well as in the weakening of the international position of Russia.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Criminal Activities and Shadow Economy

Several sources of funding are related to criminal activities and shadow economy of Chechnya. To begin with, Chechnya provided a safe place for the flush of illegal money from Russia and especially from launderers of public funds.<sup>47</sup> The same holds true with respect to the godfathers of the Chechen mafia. The latter, who were very influential in Moscow, laundered their money in Chechnya.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet military withdrawal from Caucasus, Afghanistan and central Asia left the region with a flood of small weapons and ammunition. This led illegal arms trade.<sup>49</sup> In addition, consumption goods such as electronics and textiles were imported duty free in Grozny and resold for a large profit in Russia.<sup>50</sup> Finally, Chechnya used to provide a safe haven for those who made huge profits from drug- and sex trafficking business.<sup>51</sup>

To the realm of criminal activities belongs also the ransom business, an activity which flourished towards the end of the First Chechen war. Kidnapping and people trading developed into a profitable economic activity. Based on figures provided by the Russian Ministry of the Interior, between 1992 and 2000 there were 1,815 incidents of kidnapping in the North Caucasus.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, according to the Russian historical and human rights society *Memorial* around 2,018 people have been kidnapped between 2002 and 2007.<sup>53</sup> Pursuant to anecdotal evidence the ransom varied according to the rank or the economic basis of the hostage. While 10,000 \$ and 20,000 \$ was the usual price for a Russian soldier and officer respectively, the price for rich civilians or western hostages used to be considerably higher.<sup>54</sup>

After all, it appears not surprising that *Zürcher* (2007) characterized Chechnya as a "miracle of the shadow economy and an El Dorado for organized economic crime."<sup>55</sup>

### B. Organization

Apart from "opportunities" of rebellion linked to the issue of financing, there are also opportunities dealing with the costs of organizing a rebellion. In other words, the lower the

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<sup>43</sup> Sagrarnoso (2007), 694.

<sup>44</sup> Zürcher (2007), 106; Dash (2000), 1520.

<sup>45</sup> Zürcher (2007), 106, 112.

<sup>46</sup> Dash (2000), 1518; Diehl/Karfurke/Kühn/Münch/Tschesche (2008), 16.

<sup>47</sup> Dash (2000), 1520.

<sup>48</sup> Zürcher (2007), 103.

<sup>49</sup> Dash (2000), 1520.

<sup>50</sup> Zürcher (2007), 103.

<sup>51</sup> Dash (2000), 1520.

<sup>52</sup> Zürcher (2007), 105.

<sup>53</sup> Diehl/Karfurke/Kühn/Münch/Tschesche (2008), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Zürcher (2007), 105.

<sup>55</sup> Zürcher (2007), 103.



costs of organization the higher the opportunities for rebellion. The *Collier-Hoeffler* model lays down in this respect the four opportunities which reduce the costs for organizing a rebellion. Adapting this model to the specificities of the Second Chechen war and aiming at avoiding overlappings with issues already discussed, the present chapter will deal with the following cost-related issues: i) weapons; ii) recruitment; iii) ethnic dominance and traditional Islamic ideology.<sup>56</sup>

### **1. Weapons**

It has been already pointed out that the Caucasus region and especially Chechnya were flooded with weapons due to the Soviet withdrawal from Caucasus and Central Asia, so that one could easily buy arms and ammunition even in the central market of Grozny.<sup>57</sup> In the context of collapse of the Soviet Union, weapons procurement was considered to be by far the easiest task.<sup>58</sup>

### **2. Recruitment**

The availability of large amounts of money for financing the Chechen rebels as described in the previous section is a decisive factor that explains the successful recruiting of fighters.<sup>59</sup> Apart from the economic, one could also add a cultural factor which consists of two elements. The first element relates to the so-called extended family. Indeed, over the course of time, recruitment became family oriented and fighting units were usually based on extended families.<sup>60</sup> The second cultural element relates to the established societal values. The Chechens are traditionally seen as a martial society, for which fighting is inextricably linked to the sense of honor and prestige.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, one should also take into account the ethnological-demographic factor. Due to the ethnic dominance of the Chechen population, the costs of mobilization and recruitment in Chechnya were considerably low.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, by the time of the outbreak of the first Chechen war, about 73 percent of the population in the Republic of Chechnya was ethnic Chechens.<sup>63</sup> Hence, from an ethnological perspective, the recruitment and mobilization barriers were very low and the revolution could spread very fast and with no resistance at all.<sup>64</sup>

### **3. Traditional Islam**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the traditional Islam entered the public life of the Chechen population. But why did this happen? For many, traditional Islam filled the moral and spiritual void which had been created as a result of the collapse of the Communist ideology.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the spread of traditional Islam as opposed to the originally non-traditional Islamic values of Chechens, can be partially attributed to the activity of Muslim missionaries and funds in the region during the 1990s. Furthermore, the recourse to the

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<sup>56</sup> A parallel can be drawn here to *Sagramoso* (2007), 682 who lays down mainly three elements facilitating violence, namely the access to weapons technology, the availability of a network of training and support, and the spread of attractive ideologies.

<sup>57</sup> Dash (2000), 1520; Zürcher (2007), 103.

<sup>58</sup> Zürcher (2007), 109.

<sup>59</sup> Zürcher (2007), 106.

<sup>60</sup> Zürcher (2007), 76.

<sup>61</sup> Zürcher (2007), 106.

<sup>62</sup> See, in general, Collier/Hoeffler/Sambanis (2005), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Zürcher (2007), 81; Falkowski (2007), 49.

<sup>64</sup> Zürcher (2007), 114.

<sup>65</sup> *Sagramoso* (2007), 695.

traditional Islamic values *per se* was supposed to constitute an ideological reaction against Russia.<sup>66</sup> Be that as it may, from the perspective of the economy of civil war, the traditional Islam offers a strong element of social cohesion. Hence, by providing a common identity and purpose in almost all fields of life - social, political, religious - it possesses a great capacity of mobilization.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, traditional Islam provides for a very attractive system of values to the young population. It propagates high social solidarity as well as mutual material support and at the same time gives the chance to jump the barrier of seniority and achieve prestige and riches while still young.<sup>68</sup> Hence, from this perspective, it gives more incentives to the young generations to join the rebel army, since it offers an organizational capacity based on elements of greed.

All in all, by offering a new common identity and a precise socio-political program, the traditional Islam limits the costs of recruitment and at the same time increases the dimensions recruitment pool since it overcomes the idea of nation. However, although it possess a great capacity for mobilization, this very ideology is responsible for the alienation of the initial nationalistic-separatist character of the Chechen war and its transformation into a military jihad.<sup>69</sup>

## VII. Ideological Transformation of the Conflict: Swift to Islam

It has been already mentioned that the formal outbreak of the Second Chechen was triggered by the invasion of Dagestan by the rebels under the leadership of the commanders Basayev and Khattab with the aim of uniting it with Chechnya and creating a Islamist republic. As the field commander Basayev has noted:

*"What is going on in Dagestan is a mighty "jihad", a holy war to expel the infidels from an Islamic land [...] We are fighting for the proclamation of an Islamic republic and the establishment of a greater Chechen empire in Chechnya, Dagestan and later also Ingushetia."*<sup>70</sup>

In fact, it was the reaction of these field commanders that Aslan Maskhadov faced when, as early as in 1998, he tried - by ordering a presidential decree - to expel from the region all foreigners who formed illegal armed groups and spread religious ideologies.<sup>71</sup> The decree was directed at Islamic fighters from the Arab world who had established training camps in Chechnya such as commander Amir Khattab.<sup>72</sup> The fact that Maskhadov did not manage to co-opt such field commanders had apart from political also ideological implications. Indeed, the ideology of the militants in the case of the Second Chechen war and onwards is based on Islamic concepts. In addition to being a struggle for independence, the conflict was considered to be mainly a *grazvat*, a religious war against "infidels" and those who "renounced their faith".<sup>73</sup>

The departure from the separatist ideology is vividly described by the Amendment of the Chechen constitution which took place in the summer of 2002. Article 1 of the constitution was modified by a provision stating that Chechnya is an Islamic state and,

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<sup>66</sup> Zürcher (2007), 88; Jansen (2010), 100.

<sup>67</sup> Falkowski (2007), 46.

<sup>68</sup> Zürcher (2007), 88; Falkowski (2007), 46.

<sup>69</sup> Sakwa (2011), 478; Sagramoso (2007), 697 *et seq.*

<sup>70</sup> Sagramoso (2007), 697.

<sup>71</sup> Zürcher (2007), 91.

<sup>72</sup> Zürcher (2007), 91-92.

<sup>73</sup> Falkowski (2007), 41.

moreover, all laws in force in its territory are derived from the Koran and the sunna.<sup>74</sup> The importance of the Islamic factor is also signified by the fact that the successor of Maskhadov, Abdul Sadulaev, had more than often recourse to Islamic rhetoric and quotations from the Koran in his decrees and addresses.<sup>75</sup> In addition to this, he reformed the separatist government by removing those adhered to nationalist ideology and replacing them with Islamists and deprived émigré separatist leaders with restricted influence on developments in Chechnya.<sup>76</sup>

All in all, the Chechen conflict has undergone a deep ideological transformation. This transformation has also effects on the qualification of the conflict. Since the political-separatist element got replaced by the Islamic-religious one, the conflict has ceased to be a civil war pursuant to the definition laid down by *Sambanis* (2004).

## VIII. Dynamics and Termination

### A. Why is the Conflict Weakening ?

During the years 1999 and 2004, the military conflict in Chechnya was very intense, although by spring 2001, large-scale military operations came to end.<sup>77</sup> From 2004 and on, the armed conflict in Chechnya began to attenuate. Since 2006 the conflict has lost much of its intensity. By 2009, the war is officially over.<sup>78</sup>

To the weakening of Chechen militants have contributed various factors. Firstly, many Chechen commanders, leaders and ideologists died, emigrated or surrendered arms.<sup>79</sup> The most notable examples in this respect is the killing of rebel president Aslan Maskhadov in 2005 and field commander Shamil Basaev in 2006.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, it became increasingly difficult to procure weapons and to raise funds to finance the struggle.<sup>81</sup> In other words, there were less opportunities and greater costs for organizing a rebellion. Thirdly, and consistent with the aforementioned factor, the Russian-Georgian and Russian-Azerbaijani borders were tightened. Consequently, the rebels lost their bases in the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia, an incident which further diminished their strength.<sup>82</sup> Another important point is the so-called human factor. Chechen people were exhausted by the war and the massive violence and increasingly opted for stability and peace.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, one could also note that high oil prices and Russia's economic regeneration played an important role since they provided the financial resources for reconstruction which were previously not available or were directed elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> However, the most important factor for the weakening of the conflict was the change in the Kremlin's policy towards Chechnya after 2002, that is the launch of the so-called Normalization policy.

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<sup>74</sup> Falkowski (2007), 42.

<sup>75</sup> Falkowski (2007), 42.

<sup>76</sup> Falkowski (2007), 42.

<sup>77</sup> Falkowski (2007), 39; Zürcher (2007), 97.

<sup>78</sup> Jansen (2010), 103.

<sup>79</sup> Falkowski (2007), 40.

<sup>80</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 102 .

<sup>81</sup> Falkowski (2007), 40.

<sup>82</sup> Falkowski (2007), 40.

<sup>83</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 102; Falkowski (2007), 40.

<sup>84</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 102.

## B. Normalization and Conflict Localization

Under the so-called Normalization policy, the responsibility for the fight against the guerrillas and the local administration of the republic was handed over to pro-Russian Chechens. In fact, compared to the Russian federal forces, the latter enjoyed the advantage of local knowledge and intelligence. Indeed, *Lyall* (2010) has underlined in this context that the operations undertaken only by pro-Russian Chechen forces were by far more efficient than the similar Russian-only operations since the former were better positioned to identify insurgents within the population.<sup>85</sup> The main reason for this is supposed to be that co-ethnicity helps attenuate the identification problem, e.g. how to identify the insurgents hiding among the local population. The fear factor should also be taken into account. It appears to be more likely for individuals to denounce insurgents to soldiers having the same ethnicity because the threat of retribution for withholding information is more credible than the threat issued by non-coethnic forces.<sup>86</sup> Hence, they were far more effective than the federal troops.<sup>87</sup> In this context, it has been argued that such a “localization” of the conflict was the only practical alternative, since the Russian military lacked sophisticated counter-insurgency capabilities.<sup>88</sup>

By 2006, Chechnya was a poor and fragmented society featuring a depressing socioeconomic picture with unusually high rates of unemployment and poverty.<sup>89</sup> The new leader of Chechnya was the 30-year-old Ramzan Kadyrov, who was appointed prime minister in March 2006. The latter is the son of Akhmad Kadyrov, who in the year 2003 was elected president of Chechnya and in 2004 was assassinated in Grozny.<sup>90</sup> Both, father and son, had fought against Russia in the First Chechen war but later switched sides.

A lot of criticism has been voiced with respect to the policies and the effects of the process of Normalization. Human rights organizations have repeatedly reported that Ramzan’s militia, the so-called *kadyrovtsy*, was responsible for serious and routine human rights abuses.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, for many western commentators, the political regime in the republic lacked legitimacy since the president is more or less appointed instead of being selected through formal democratic procedures.<sup>92</sup> In addition, since the conflict had been transformed from a Russian-Chechen to an internal Chechen clash, more and more often, the militants targeted the pro-Russian Chechen forces.<sup>93</sup> The intensity of the internal mutual hatred can be illustrated by the common practice of killing the relatives of enemies or taking them as hostages, a tactic used by both Chechen sides of the conflict.<sup>94</sup> Finally, until the mid-late 2000s the conflict was supposed to have atomised Chechen society, and to have destroyed moral standards as well as social, clan and family bonds.<sup>95</sup>

However, nowadays, Russian policies towards Chechnya are supposed to have succeeded,<sup>96</sup> far more than is generally acknowledged outside Russia.<sup>97</sup> Ramzan Kadyrov is

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<sup>85</sup> *Lyall* (2010), 1,2,14.

<sup>86</sup> *Lyall* (2010), 16.

<sup>87</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 103.

<sup>88</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 103.

<sup>89</sup> Sagramoso (2007), 692.

<sup>90</sup> Zürcher (2007), 98.

<sup>91</sup> Zürcher (2007), 98.

<sup>92</sup> Zürcher (2007), 97.

<sup>93</sup> Falkowski (2007), 51.

<sup>94</sup> Falkowski (2007), 52.

<sup>95</sup> Falkowski (2007), 52.

<sup>96</sup> Till 2005, the policy of Normalization and Russia's approach to the Chechen conflict was widely held as unsuccessful; see, in this respect, Dannreuther/March (2008), 102.

<sup>97</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 98.

proving to be an effective and capable leader with a sufficient sense of strategy. Kadyrov has been also fairly efficient in persuading insurgents to switch sides.<sup>98</sup> The republic is now relatively calm, is being gradually rebuilt,<sup>99</sup> it recovers economically and constitutes a loyal member of the Russian Federation. Although there were suspicions that behind Ramzan's loyalty there might be a certain amount of hidden separatism,<sup>100</sup> Kadyrov is perceived as Russia's most faithful servant in the North Caucasus. Of course, many problems still remain in Chechnya. However, the situation has greatly improved over the last few years.<sup>101</sup>

### C. About Fragile Negotiations, Decisive Victories and the Strengthening of State

As such the Chechen war has had a symbolic dimension which reflected the political realities within the Russian Federation. It symbolized the period of time when the Russian Federation was striving for survival. During the nineties, Russia was a state which could not ensure effective control over its territory and its borderlines were put into question. In particular, Chechnya reflected the threat of disintegration, the weakening of state structures and Russia's basic inability to stand up for itself and secure its national objectives.<sup>102</sup> For Russian politics, Chechnya encapsulated two antithetic directions.<sup>103</sup> On the one side, it was a sort of embarrassment to be disguised by propaganda. On the other side, it reflected a recognized failure demanding a concrete action.

In 1996 the President of the Russian Federation did negotiate an agreement, the so-called Accord of Khasavyurt, with the Chechen rebel leaders granting them a *de facto* independence.<sup>104</sup> The Russian troops pulled out and the Republic was under the control of the field commanders. As such the question concerning the status of Chechnya was postponed for a later negotiation in 2001. In the meanwhile, Russia grew stronger.

In the terms of *Luttwak* (1999) one could characterize the victory of the Chechen forces during the first war only as a temporary one. Indeed, there were no sufficient incentives for both belligerents to negotiate a concrete and lasting settlement. Indeed, according to *Luttwak* (1999) "*peace takes hold only when the war is truly over*".<sup>105</sup> Far more precise appears to be in this context *Richard Betts* (1994). The latter perceives a compromise probable if and only if both belligerent sides believe that they have more to lose than to gain from fighting.<sup>106</sup> He characteristically notes that a "*stalemate is likely to yield to negotiated compromise only after it lasts so long that a military solution appears hopeless to both sides*".<sup>107</sup> As regards Chechnya, this was, however, not the case. Pursuant to *Betts* and *Luttwaks* line of argument, Russia's dominant priority following the outcome of the First Chechen war must have been the preparation for a future war, a war that had to be won. As *Dannreuther/March* (2007) point out, there is no doubt that Vladimir Putin was deeply offended by the chaotic state of Russia in the 1990s, of which North Caucasus and in particular Chechnya was the most flagrant example.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 104.

<sup>99</sup> For a closer look to the different approaches towards state-building see, for instance, Sokirianskaia (2010), 5 *et seq.*

<sup>100</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 107; See also Jansen (2010), 105; Falkowski (2007), 58.

<sup>101</sup> Dannreuther/March (2008), 98.

<sup>102</sup> Dannreuther/March (2007), 99.

<sup>103</sup> Dannreuther/March (2007), 97.

<sup>104</sup> Zürcher (2007), 84.

<sup>105</sup> Luttwak (1999), 37-38.

<sup>106</sup> Betts (1994), 22.

<sup>107</sup> Betts (1994), 24.

<sup>108</sup> Dannreuther/March (2007), 99.



Be that as it may, the major argument of *Luttwak* (1999) refers to the fact that conflicts should be left to have their own course of development without any intervention from abroad, e.g. international organizations, third states or even NGOs. For *Luttwak* (1999) peace comes only after a decisive victory of the one belligerent party and the defeat including the material and psychological exhaustion of the other belligerent party.<sup>109</sup> Evaluating the Second Chechen conflict from this somewhat cynical point of view, one can see that the military victory of the Russian Federation over the rebel forces as well as the post conflict situation in Chechnya in general did reflect the characteristics of a decisive victory: To begin with, the war was accompanied by a huge number of casualties, a policy heavily criticized in the literature.<sup>110</sup> Hence, the pool of potential recruitment of rebels was physically shrinking. Moreover, the moral of the rebel forces was gradually crushed. Furthermore, the normalization policy, which transformed the conflict into an intra-Chechen question, marked a victory at the political field of the battle. The subsequent support and cultification of Kadyrov's image reflects the victory at the level of political participation and communication. *Lyall* (2010) characteristically stated in this context that given the decisiveness the victory, one might easily draw the conclusion that the probability a recurrence of conflict is low.<sup>111</sup>

In short: History appears to be going backwards. The stronger Russia became, the more capable it was to cope with the rebels and, consequently, the more persistent the peace became.

#### **D. Terrorist Methods**

Apart from the ideological transformation from a separatist war into an Islamic jihad, starting from 2002, some militants began to use terrorist methods. In October 2002, about 129 persons have lost their lives at the Dubrovka theater hostage-taking in Moscow. In the same vein, more than 370 persons, mostly children, have lost their lives as a result of the hostage-taking in Beslan, in North Ossetia. In both cases, the responsibility had been claimed by the field commander Shamil Basaev.<sup>112</sup>

Since the summer of 2009 there has been a considerable increase in the number of terrorist acts committed in Chechnya, ruining the image of the "Normalization" policy.<sup>113</sup> In November 2009, a bomb attempt on the Moscow-St. Petersburg express took the life of 28 passengers, some of them Russian state officials. Chechen rebels have claimed that the attempt had been instrumentalized by their commander, Dokku Umarov who is the successor of Shamil Basaev. In March 2010, the Moscow metro suicide bombings took the life of 40 civilians. Again, in February 2011, 37 persons lost their lives as a result of the suicide bombings at Domodedovo International Airport. In both cases the responsibility was claimed by Dokku Umarov.<sup>114</sup>

As early as in 2007, Umarov declared the establishment of a Caucasus emirate accompanied by the declaration of war across the region.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, he is wanted both by Russia and the United States for terrorist attacks, and since 10 March 2011 he has been on the United Nations Security Council Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee list.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Luttwak (1999), 43.

<sup>110</sup> See, e.g., Jansen (2010), 101; Zürcher (2007), 99 *et seq.*

<sup>111</sup> Lyall (2010), 18.

<sup>112</sup> Zürcher (2007), 96.

<sup>113</sup> Jansen (2010), 105.

<sup>114</sup> See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8597792.stm> (last visited 18/11/2012).

<sup>115</sup> Sakwa (2011), 478.

<sup>116</sup> See <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI29011E.shtml> (last visited 18/11/2012).



Yet, recourse to such methods brings the conflict outside the territory of Chechnya and targets persons that under no circumstances could ever be seen as combatants. Hence, terrorist methods constitute a further departure from the definition of “civil war” pursuant to *Sambanis* (2004) and especially from the territorial and the governmental element respectively.

## IX. Wrap it Up

The present survey aims at examining causes, dynamics and termination of the Second Chechen War. It begins with a brief analysis of the main theories applied for explaining the emergence of internal conflicts and sets as its methodological tools the risk theory as described in the study of *Zürcher* (2007) in conjunction with the *Collier-Hoeffler* model on civil war onsets. The latter considers rebellion as an industry which generates profits. Availability of finance is, thus, a critical factor that increases the risk of rebellion

At first look, the Second Chechen war appears to fulfill all five elements of *Sambanis* (2004) necessary for the qualification of an internal conflict as a “civil war”. Its formal outbreak goes back to August 1999 when, under the leadership of commanders Shamil Basayev and Amir Khatab, the Chechen rebels invaded the neighboring republic of Dagestan aiming at liberating it and uniting it with Chechnya in order to form an Islamist republic. However, its main cause can be found in the previous Chechen war which made the already fragile institutions weaker and allowed the emergence of entrepreneurs of violence. The latter had no special interest in establishing a functional state but rather in the perpetuation of an economy of war.

On the basis of the *Collier-Hoeffler* model, the survey shows that the opportunities of financing the war were plenty. In particular, there were large revenues stemming from the oil-business, considerable donations from the international funding of jihad as well as profitable criminal activities and a thriving shadow economy. Apart from “opportunities” of rebellion linked to the issue of financing, there were also opportunities concerning the low cost of organizing a rebellion: In the context of collapse of the Soviet Union, weapons procurement was considered to be by far the easiest task. Recruitment was also an easy task due to economic, cultural and demographical factors. Finally, the traditional forms of Islam offered a new common identity and a precise socio-political program. Hence, traditional Islam limited the costs of mobilization and recruitment and at the same time increased the dimensions of the recruitment pool.

Due to the ideological transformation of the Chechen conflict into a military jihad, the Second Chechen war cannot be longer seen as a civil war in terms of *Sambanis* (2004) because the political-separatist element got replaced by the Islamic-religious one.

As regards its dynamics, various factors have contributed to the weakening of the conflict. Yet, the most important one was the launch of the so-called Normalization policy, e.g. the transfer of responsibility and powers to pro-Russian Chechens. Hence, the conflict was transformed from a Russo-Chechen into an internal Chechen one. One should refer in this context to *Lyall* (2010) who underlined that the operations undertaken only by pro-Russian Chechen forces were by far more efficient than the similar Russian-only operations since the former were better positioned to identify insurgents within the population.

With respect to the termination of the Second Chechen war, one could bear in mind the approach of *Luttwak* (1999) according to which peace comes only after a decisive victory of the one belligerent party and the defeat including the material and psychological exhaustion of the other. The military victory of the Russian Federation over the rebel forces as

well as the post conflict situation in Chechnya in general did reflect the characteristics of a decisive victory: The war was accompanied by a huge number of casualties. Hence, the pool of potential recruitment of rebels was physically shrinking. Moreover, the moral of the rebel forces was gradually crushed. Furthermore, the normalization policy, which transformed the conflict into an intra-Chechen question, marked a victory at the political field of the battle. The subsequent support and cultification of Kadyrovs image reflects the victory at the level of political participation and communication. *Lyall* (2010) characteristically stated in this context that given the decisiveness the victory, one might easily draw the conclusion that the probability a recurrence of conflict is low

In short: History appears to be going backwards. The stronger Russia became, the more capable it was to cope with the rebels and, consequently, the more persistent the peace became.

Finally, the conflict experienced another qualitative change due to the extensive use of terrorist methods. Recourse to such methods brings the conflict outside the territory of Chechnya and targets persons that under no circumstances could ever be seen as combatants. Hence, terrorist methods constitute a further departure from the definition of “civil war” pursuant to *Sambanis* (2004) and especially from the territorial and the governmental element respectively. Thus, the Second Chechen war could be seen as a typical “civil war” in terms of *Sambanis* (2004) only throughout its early stages.

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